

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 574

EC 220 778

AUTHOR Skakun, Vivian
TITLE Why Change Our Service Delivery in Special Education?
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 11p.; In: Baine, David, Ed.; And Others. Alternative Futures for the Education of Students with Severe Disabilities (Edmonton, Canada, May 6-8, 1987). For proceedings, see EC 220 763; for other selected papers, see ED 220 764-782.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classification; Cultural Differences; *Delivery Systems; *Disabilities; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Handicap Identification; *Labeling (of Persons); *Mainstreaming; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; Special Education; Test Bias
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper challenges the theoretical knowledge base upon which the Canadian separate special education delivery system has been developed. Arguments for integration of special needs children into the mainstream of education are presented from a social-ethical, educational-psychological, and legal-legislative perspective. Examination of the current service delivery model notes that a disproportionate number of minority and bilingual children have been misclassified as mentally handicapped; that labelling children as mentally handicapped has a stigmatizing effect; that labelling results in the "self-fulfilling prophecy" phenomenon; that misclassification between moderately handicapped, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed categories is common; and that student placement is often dependent on standardized tests with major deficiencies. It is concluded that a general education program is needed that includes instructional strategies that can accommodate and adapt to children with varying educational needs. (Author/DB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED310574

Why Change our Service Delivery in Special Education?

Vivian Skakun

Gateway Association for the Mentally Handicapped,
Edmonton

Abstract

This paper challenges the theoretical knowledge base upon which the separate special education delivery system has been developed. Arguments for integration of special needs children into the mainstream of education are presented from a social-ethical, educational-psychological, and legal-legislative perspective.

The evolution of education for the child with exceptional needs has moved from exclusion from regular classrooms to increased inclusion. Arguments for why children should be integrated are presented from social-ethical, educational-psychological, and legal-legislative perspectives. The movement from segregated to integrated placements is a result of the criticisms of the applied or practical knowledge base in special education (Skrtic, 1986). However, the theoretical knowledge base, or the premise on which special education was developed, has remained unchallenged. This paper discloses the issues and concerns that have arisen from this service delivery model. A more detailed discussion is found in Skakun (1987).

Social-Ethical Arguments for Integration

Placement of students with disabilities in special education classes in schools away from the neighborhood school perpetuates segregation and isolation and creates barriers to becoming fully accepted, participating members in our community. Integration and normalization is a goal of society (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984). The benefits accrued from integration are of value both to exceptional children as well as their peers. When students learn alongside nonhandicapped peers in the neighborhood school, they are provided with role models for good social skills development and have more opportunity for social interactions and the possibility of establishing friendships in their neighborhood. Their peers' and society's perceptions of the handicapped can be altered through increased participation in integrated educational settings, hence furthering the goal of increased community participation (Bricker, 1978; Brinker & Thorpe, 1984). Children with disabilities have a right to live, work, and play within the culture in which they live, not within a sub-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

David Baine

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC 220778

culture (Brown, 1986). Increased participation in integrated settings that are supported and planned for can only lead to future generations that are more humanitarian and more accepting of the individual differences of exceptional children and adults.

Educational-Psychological Arguments for Integration

The exclusionary process of placing students in special classes further depressed the already lagging developmental growth of the impaired child and deprived these children of the stimulation of nonhandicapped children as learning models and helpers. Interaction in a progressively more demanding environment, so essential to the "normal" child, is equally important to the disabled child (Feuerstein, Rand, & Hoffman, 1982; Guralnick, 1978).

The strongest argument for integration is the research on the efficacy of special classes (Dunn, 1968; Glass, 1983). Dunn (1968) questioned the effectiveness of special classes for the educably mentally handicapped. He cited the long history of "efficacy" research that has failed to indicate that children who attended special classes achieved more than children who attended regular classes.

The research concerning the educational effects of ability grouping and special education reveals that classification, as it is typically employed, does not promote individual student learning, permit more effective teaching of groups of students of relatively similar ability, or indeed accomplish any of the things it is ostensibly meant to do. (Feuerstein et al., 1982, p. 13)

The dominant trend in efficacy research has favored children attending regular classes (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984; Goldstein, Moss, & Jordan, 1965; Gottlieb, 1981; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Semmel, Gottlieb, & Robinson, 1979; Strain & Kerr, 1981). Integration is an educational tool for achieving curriculum goals (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984).

Legal-Legislative Arguments for Integration

These arguments for integration have evolved from court battles and legislation that required that handicapped children learn in "normal" environments.

Internationally, "normalization" (National Institute on Mental Retardation, 1981; Nirje, 1985; Perrin & Nirje, 1985), "the principle of educating handicapped persons in and for the 'normal' environment of the non-handicapped" (Reynolds & Birch, 1982, p. 25), became the policy in the 1960s in the Scandinavian countries. This movement is worldwide and appears to be enduring (Reynolds & Birch, 1982). In the United States, litigation and legislation have led to the inclusion of the handicapped in regular educational settings. In Canada, national, provincial, and local associations, as well as numerous chapters across

Canada belonging to the Integration Action Group are rallying together to demand an educational system that reflects quality, relevance, and equity for their children.

As of April 17, 1985, Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality for all irrespective of race, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability in all parts of Canada except Quebec (McLellan, 1986). In the Equality For All Monogram, authorized by the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights (1985), three legislative amendments relevant to the mentally disabled are recommended:

1. that federal laws and politics providing benefits or protection to the mentally disabled be appropriately amended so that they cover those with a mental disability in the comprehensive sense, that is, mental retardation or impairment, learning disability and mental disorder.
2. that Section 14(4) (f) of the Canadian Elections Act be repealed so that the mentally disabled have the same right to be enumerated and to vote as all other Canadians.
3. that the Minister of Justice bring forward amendments to the Criminal Code at the earliest opportunity to eliminate instances where the mentally disabled are not accorded equal protection and equal benefit of the law. (The Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights, 1985, p. 176, as cited in McLellan, 1986, p. 7)

"*Equal benefit* implies the opportunity for students to achieve their fullest potential and best development as members of the particular human society into which they are born or immigrated" (Porter, 1986, p. 8).

Although it is not yet known how the Canadian judicial system will interpret the third amendment, in the following section there are some examples of the American interpretation. Equal protection and equal benefit of the law are denied when tracking or ability grouping is based on standardized tests, misclassification occurs, handicapped students are denied access to interaction with nonhandicapped peers, decisions are made regarding student placement without due process, placement is made without appropriate program planning and support, and monetary problems are used as an excuse to violate student rights (Yseldyke & Algozzine, 1982).

In education, to ensure that the disabled learner is "accorded *equal protection and equal benefits of the law*" (McLellan, 1986), each province has revised or is revising its School Act to reflect these major changes.

Although Alberta Education in *Partners in Education: Principles for a New School Act* (1985) promised to entrench Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Bill 59, the 1987 proposed New School Act, appeared to contravene this section of the charter, as this bill would have given school boards the right to declare a student

non-educable and refuse to provide special education or any other education because of "severe lack of intellectual capacity" or "severe medical fragility."¹

Parents whose children are denied access to an educational program will have no recourse but to take legal action. Rather than using valuable dollars for productive educational purposes, depleting resources will be spent on legal expenses. Every child is capable of learning. Failure to do so is a reflection of the inadequacies of our educational system, not deficiencies within the child (Sobsey, 1987).

Currently, the Individual Rights' Protection Act (Province of Alberta, Consolidated July 19, 1985) does not include the protection of the mentally handicapped from discrimination. To protect mentally handicapped individuals from flagrant abuse of the non-educable clause in the proposed Bill 59, the Individual Rights' Protection Act needs to address issues regarding assessment, student evaluation and identification in special education, and its possible impingement on equal protection and equal benefit of the law. The U.S. ruling that tracking or classifying students on the basis of standardized tests is unconstitutional and does not reflect the child's capacity to learn (Galagan, 1985; Prasse & Reschly, 1986) has implications for educational practices in Alberta and in Canada.

The Current Service Delivery Model

Our current service delivery model in special education requires screening, assessment, labelling, and placement into a special education category before services and funds (at the district level) can be accessed. A number of issues and concerns have arisen from this practice.

A disproportionate number of minority and bilingual children have been misclassified as mentally handicapped based on intelligence tests standardized on white children (Ingalls, 1978; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Semmel, Gottlieb, & Robinson, 1979). Ethnic students who are doing poorly but not creating problems are not likely to be referred to special classes. However, if they are also behavior problems, their chances of being placed in special classes greatly increase (Ingalls, 1978; Kirk & Gallagher, 1983). Special classes have become a dumping ground for all kinds of problem students. Regular teachers find it easier to arrange to have a child moved to a special class than to try to resolve the problem and provide the special programming required.

Labelling children as mentally handicapped has a stigmatizing effect (Bricker, 1978; Dunn, 1968; Gottlieb, 1981; National Institute on Mental Retardation, 1981). The label could have an important impact on their self-esteem and "massively damaging effects upon the individual's prospects in life" (Feuerstein et al., 1982, p. 9), as it reduces their self-image and their worth in the eyes of others (Dunn, 1968; Feuerstein et

al., 1982). Labels generate uniform attitudes and responses. The individual, the family, the community, and the school develop a whole series of behavioral expectation (Feuerstein et al., 1982, p. 12), misconceptions, images, stereotypes, beliefs, and fears of the handicapped (Feuerstein et al., 1982; Strain & Kerr, 1981). Special classes further serve to emphasize the atypical characteristics rather than the strengths or positive attributes of the child with special needs. These children are viewed as different; they are not viewed as having qualities and strengths along a continuum of development (Guralnick, 1978).

Labels suggest that these children can be sorted into neat homogenous categories requiring identical educational services (Strain & Kerr, 1981). Assigning all children in a given I.Q. range to one class is useful only if the children learn in the same way. However, these children have as many different learning styles as there are children in a class (Biklen, 1985; Feuerstein et al., 1982; Reynolds & Balow, 1972; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Wang & Birch, 1984).

Labelling students also results in the "self-fulfilling prophecy" phenomenon. Less is expected of students identified as mentally handicapped, and as a result they achieve less (Dunn, 1968; Strain & Kerr, 1981; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982; Will, 1986). Because learning abilities of students are underestimated and the curriculum is "watered-down," special education programs are failing to provide a sufficient challenge to the students (Feuerstein et al., 1982; Madden & Slavin, 1983).

Feuerstein et al., (1982) discuss the detrimental effects of labels on "educational goal setting":

It ipso facto orients the teacher, and no less the whole environment, toward concrete modes of transmission, problem presentation and response management. Very limited use is made of higher levels of thought processes, symbols, and abstract levels of communication. (p. 15)

Our curriculum restricts the mentally handicapped from developing in the very areas in which they are weak—that is, the "autonomous, abstract, representational, cognitive functioning" (Feuerstein et al., 1982, p. 14). Thus we have a perpetuation of "low level functioning."

All special education decisions are made on the assumption that we have testing instruments that are technically adequate to discriminate the degree of mental handicap that exists in an individual or the special education category to which the student belongs.

Misclassification can occur between moderately handicapped, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed categories (Galagan, 1985) because of the overlapping characteristics identifiable in these three categories. Misclassification can also occur within the categorical boun-

daries of dependent, trainable, and educable (National Institute on Mental Retardation, 1981).

Placement of students has been dependent on standardized tests that have a number of deficiencies (Galagan, 1985, p. 288):

1. They are culturally and socially biased resulting in the misclassification of minority children.
2. They are unreliable and unvalidated for the purpose of determining which children have characteristics consistent with mildly handicapping conditions (i.e. moderate mental retardation, behavior disorder, learning disabled) and with placement in mildly handicapped classes.
3. They are convenient and expedient means of classifying and excluding children from regular education and have thus fostered the creation of a dual educational system.
4. They are of little or no use in formulating instructional programs for students, particularly those classified as mildly handicapped.

Other factors contributing to a deficiency in assessment and placement are inappropriate use of tests and inappropriate interpretation of test scores. Test abuse can further result if the standardized tests have not been appropriately normed or if the norms are not current (Torgesen & Wong, 1986; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982).

Despite the growing body of research indicating that the traditional assessment practices are inadequate and provide no relevant information for program planning (Galagan, 1985), public policy continues to support a massive system of identification that is intent on finding deficits, disabilities, and dysfunctions in the child to be eligible for services. The current system of classifying students for special educational services on the basis of etiology rather than educational need is also not serving the child who needs help, but who does not fit into any category (Will, 1986). It is estimated that 50% to 60% of all school children are in need of help (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982).

One Psychology of Learning for All Students

Special education typically has been based on the medical model of diagnosing the deficit, disability, or dysfunction within the individual on the basis of supposed common symptoms or characteristics and providing an educational treatment to match the deficit, disability, or dysfunction (Cocks, 1985). It was assumed that amelioration of the disability, deficit, or dysfunction (e.g., visual perceptual training, perceptual motor training, psycholinguistic training) is necessary before academic skills can be learned. This approach has been documented as ineffective (Galagan, 1985; Glass, 1983; Reynolds & Birch, 1982; Torgesen & Wong, 1986; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982). Direct instruction or instruction based on assessment of students' skills rather than the cause

of academic difficulty has been most effective (Galagan, 1985; Glass, 1983; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982).

The most recent assumption to be challenged is "that there are two methodologies or psychologies of learning—one for 'special' people and one for 'regular' people (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p. 103). Stainback and Stainback present the rationale for a *merger of special and regular education*. The dual educational system is not necessary as "there are no unique methods for use with exceptional children that differ for those used with normal children" (Gardner, 1977, p. 74).

Conclusion

Our educational system is not meeting the needs for children with learning problems. It is based on assumptions that have been criticized as being atheoretical, confounded theory, and wrong theory (Skrtic, 1986). The way our system has addressed the serious problems in education is flawed (Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987).

As Gerber (in press, as cited in Reynolds et al., 1987) summarizes,

for practical purposes, there is increasingly convergent belief that these subgroups of learning problems represent a continuum of cognitive and adaptive inefficiency and ineffectiveness in classroom learning situations, and not discreetly different disabilities. (p. 394)

Given the serious problems in grouping students into "various categories that lack evidence of validity" (Reynolds et al., 1987, p. 396) and the false premises on which special education has been established, we are in need of redevelopment and redesign of our current service delivery model.

We need to create a general education program that includes instructional strategies that can accommodate and adapt to children with varying educational needs. Skrtic (1986) suggests that in redesigning our educational system our disciplinary base should expand beyond psychology and biology to include social, political, and cultural sciences. We can then create a service delivery with an alternative frame of reference.

Editors' Note

1. Revisions to Bill 59 have just been released at the time of publication and appear to remedy the expressed concerns.

References

- Alberta Education. (1985, January). *Partners in education: Principles for a new school act*.
- Biklen, D. (1985). *Achieving the complete school: Strategies for effective mainstreaming*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Bricker, D. (1978). A rationale for the integration of handicapped preschool children. In M. Guralnick, *Early intervention and the integration of handicapped and non-handicapped children*. Nisoger Centre: Ohio State University.
- Brinker, R., & Thorpe, M. (1984). *Research report evaluation of the integration of severely handicapped students in regular education and community settings*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Brown, L. (1986, February). *Effective educational programming for the severely/moderately handicapped*. Inservice presentation sponsored by Edmonton Public School Board.
- Cocks, E. (1985). Roadblocks to appropriate services for persons with an intellectual disability in Australia. *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 11(2), 75-82.
- Dunn, L. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded—Is much of it justified? *Exceptional Children*, 35(1), 5-22.
- Feuerstein, R., Rand, Y., & Hoffman, M. (1982). *The dynamic assessment of retarded performers*. Baltimore: University Park Press.
- Galagan, J. (1985). Psychoeducational testing: Turn out the lights, the party's over. *Exceptional Children*, 52(3), 288-299.
- Gardner, W. (1977). *Learning and behavior characteristics of exceptional children and youth*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Glass, G. (1983). Effectiveness of special education. *Policies Studies Review*, 2(1), 65-78.
- Goldstein, H., Moss, J., & Jordan, L. (1965). *The efficacy of special class training on the development of mentally retarded children*. Co-operative research project report no. 619. Urbana, IL: U.S. Office of Education.
- Gottlieb, J. (1981). Mainstreaming: Fulfilling the promise? *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 86(2), 115-126.
- Guralnick, M. (1978). *Early intervention and the integration of handicapped and non-handicapped children*. Nisoger Centre: Ohio State University.
- Ingalls, R. (1978). *Mental retardation, the changing outlook*. New York: John Wiley & Son.
- Kirk, S., & Gallagher, J. (1983). *Educating exceptional children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Madden, N., & Slavin, R. (1983). Mainstreaming students with mild handicaps: Academic and social outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 53(4), 519-569.
- McLellan, W. (1986). A review of the *Equality for All Monogram*. *Alberta Perspective*, 5(1), 7-8.

- National Institute on Mental Retardation. (1981). *Orientation manual on mental retardation*. Downsview, Ontario.
- Nirje, B. (1985). The basis and logic of the normalization principle. *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 11(2), 65-68.
- Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights. (1985). *Equality for All Monogram*. Ottawa, ON: The Queen's Printer.
- Perrin, B., & Nirje, B. (1985). Setting the record straight: A critique of some frequent misconceptions of the normalization principle. *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 11(2), 69-74.
- Porter, G. (1986). *Community Living 2000, The C.A.C.L. Task Force*. Downsview, ON: Canadian Association for Community Living.
- Prasse, D., & Reschly, D. (1986). Larry P.: A case of segregation, testing or program efficacy? *Exceptional Children*, 52(4), 333-346.
- Reynolds, M., & Balow, B. (1972). Categories and variables in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 38(5), 357-366.
- Reynolds, M., & Birch, J. (1982). *Teaching exceptional children in all America's schools*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Reynolds, M., Wang, M., & Walberg, H. (1987). The necessary restructuring of special & regular education. *Exceptional Children*, 53(5), 391-398.
- Semmel, M., Gottlieb, J., & Robinson, N. (1979). Mainstreaming: Perspectives on educating handicapped children in the public school. In D.C. Berliner (Ed.), *Review of Research in Education*. American Educational Research Association, 7, 223-279.
- Skakun, V. (1987). *Restructuring our educational system to meet the unique needs of every child: A position paper on integration within effective educational settings*. Edmonton: Gateway Association for the Mentally Handicapped.
- Škrtic, T. (1986). The crisis in special education knowledge: A perspective on perspective. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 18(7), 1-16.
- Sobsey, D. (1987, October). *Bill 59: Is this the end of universal free education in Alberta?* Discussion paper. University of Alberta, Edmonton.
- Stainback, W., & Stainback, S. (1984). A rationale for the merger of special and regular education. *Exceptional Children*, 51(2), 102-111.
- Strain, P., & Kerr, M. (1981). *Mainstreaming of children in schools*. New York: Academic Press.
- Torgesen, J., & Wong, B. (1986). *Psychological and educational perspectives on learning disabilities*. Orlando: Academic Press.

- Wang, M., & Birch, J. (1984). Comparison of a full-time mainstreaming program and a resource room approach. *Exceptional Children*, 51(1), 33-40.
- Will, M. (1986). Educating children with learning problems: A shared responsibility. *Exceptional Children*, 51(1), 11-16.
- Ysseldyke, J., & Algozzine, B. (1982). *Critical issues in special and remedial education*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.